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TAGS: PREF PHUM RS

SUBJECT: P-1 REFERRAL FOR BELARUSIAN MINOR ANTON FILIMONOV

REF: A. MOSCOW 2197

- 1B. HOGAN/RICHARDSON E-MAIL 5/25/07
- 1C. HOGAN/RICHARDSON E-MAIL 5/22/07
- 1D. HOGAN/RICHARDSON E-MAIL 5/18/07
- 1E. MESTETSKY/RICHARDSON E-MAIL 5/17/07

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Daniel A. Russell.
Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

11. (U) This is an action request. See paragraph 7.

12. (C) Embassy recommends Anton Filimonov, the 17-year-old son of murdered Belarusian journalist Veronika Cherkasova, for inclusion in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).

Filimonov fled Belarus on May 9 in fear of renewed police pressure to force him to confess to his mother's murder. Filimonov previously spent two and a half months in a Minsk jail following a conviction on a forgery charge during which investigators tried to force him to admit the murder. He was later released on bail. Filimonov's grandparents have asserted that the detention and ill treatment worsened his health and if he returns to Minsk he would die in custody. Filimonov has a heart defect and a displaced kidney that require medication, and Belarusian authorities previously refused to provide that medication when he was detained earlier.

13. (C) Biographic information is follows:

Name: Filimonov, Anton Dmitriyevich
DPOB: 1 Oct 1989 Minsk, Belarus
He does not have an international passport.

14. (C) In 2004, Cherkasova, an outspoken critic of the Belarusian Government, was stabbed to death in her apartment in Minsk. As noted ref A, Filimonov and Vladimir Meleshko, her stepfather, were quickly named as suspects. Filimonov fled to Moscow in February 2005 and stayed until April, returning to Minsk when authorities announced he was not a suspect any longer because there was no evidence linking him to the crime. In December 2005, he was charged with currency forgery and held two and a half months in isolation while authorities reopened their investigation in Cherkasova's death. According to Amnesty International, Filimonov and two friends reproduced Belarusian bank notes on a home computer and attempted to use them to buy cigarettes from a street vendor. In April 2006, he was given a two-and-a-half year suspended sentence but he was required to report to authorities monthly. Amnesty International asserted that the forgery charges and detention were further attempts to pressure him to either confess to the crime or implicate Meleshko.

15. (C) In early May, in the courtyard of the family's apartment building, a teen-ager was stabbed. Fearing that the police would find reason to implicate Filimonov, and again resort to harsh interrogations and other psychological pressure, Meleshko brought him to Moscow and approached us.

Meleshko was aware that Filimonov's leaving Belarus was a violation of his parole, but he has consistently said that he and Filimonov believe that authorities would not stop their persecution until Filimonov was dead. They believe that once authorities realize that Anton has fled, they will begin an active search for him, likely alerting Russian police and requesting extradition. Although Filimonov has a father in Moscow who sheltered the boy in 2005, he has offered no support to Filimonov since his latest arrival in Moscow, and it appears that he and Filimonov have no on-going relationship.

¶6. (C) Filimonov has been interviewed by UNHCR (ref a), which has told us privately that the criminal conviction for forgery would make his resettlement difficult if not impossible in other resettlement countries, leaving resettlement to the U.S. as the best likely durable solution. UNHCR has agreed to provide the required best interests of the child determination

¶7. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Filimonov, as a teenager, has not been involved in any activist or dissident activity. The prevailing belief among many human rights and free press organizations is that he became a convenient target for the authorities in trying to quickly solve his mother's murder in order to deflect suspicion from the government. Amnesty International, the International Federation of Journalists, and the Committee to Protect Journalists have criticized the GOB for its treatment of him and its inability to solve Cherkasova's murder. In several conversations with Filimonov and Meleshko, and in consulting with Embassy Minsk and the Department (refs B, C, D, and E), we believe that Filimonov has a well-founded fear of future persecution should he return to Minsk and recommend him for referral to the USRAP. We request Department concurrence soonest.

RUSSELL